

peace and reconciliation in that troubled land, and he always insisted on meeting with Protestant leaders visiting this country.

Paul was elected to a number of offices in his long and brilliant career, including President of the New York City Council. Once, when asked about his decision to come to America as an immigrant, Paul said "I thought of going back, but something that grips you as an immigrant is the sense of freedom here." As few individuals have ever done, he worked hard and long and well to provide that freedom for all Americans. We will miss his leadership, and we will miss his friendship.

#### PASSAGE OF A+ SAVINGS ACCOUNT BILL

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent this morning and I missed the vote on the Conference Report for H.R. 1882 the A+ Savings Account for Public and Private Schools.

I am pleased that this bill was approved by the Senate by a vote of 59-36. This legislation has my wholehearted support.

Several significant reforms in the bill are based, in part, on findings of a Senate Task Force on Education that I was privileged to be a part of. These include testing and merit pay incentives of teachers, and tax incentives for parents who save for their children's K-12 education needs.

The President should look at the merits of this bill and sign it into law. It is time that the federal government stops enabling an entrenched education bureaucracy that resists every attempt at exponential change.

New Mexicans, I believe, are ready to embrace such change, and this legislation is the vehicle to begin making our schools ready for the twenty-first century.

I am pleased this bill includes a provision to provide incentive funds to states that establish periodic assessments of elementary and secondary school teachers, including a merit pay system to reward teachers based on merit and proven performance. The provision permits the use of federal education dollars to establish and administer these programs.

Teacher testing and merit pay is an important philosophical shift. It is reasonable to expect teachers to know the subject matter they are responsible for imparting to our young people.

The centerpiece of the bill is the establishment of tax-free savings accounts that can be used for qualified education expenses from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Main provisions in the bill, beyond the merit pay and block grant provisions, are:

**A+ Savings Accounts.**—These accounts are similar to the current Education IRA for college tuition. Under this bill, the annual contribution limit will be increased from \$500 to \$2,000 a year. This gives millions of families the

opportunity to save tax-free for their children's education.

**Extend employer-provided education benefits to 1 million employees.**—The bill extends this popular provision that allows employees to accept employer-provided education assistance without having to declare it as income (up to \$5,250 a year). The tax exclusion will apply to assistance for undergraduate courses.

**Allow 1 million students to benefit from tax-free state pre-paid tuition plans.**—Many states have established pre-paid tuition plans to make it more affordable to attend state colleges in the future, and to help families save for this important expenses. The bill goes a step beyond tax deferral of such savings as currently allowed—this bill makes such savings tax-free. (The New Mexico legislature is expected to consider a pre-paid tuition plan.)

**School Construction:** Assists local governments in issuing tax-exempt bonds for school construction by increasing the small-issuer exception from \$10 million to \$15 million, provided that at least \$10 million of the bonds are issued to finance public schools.

**Health Scholarships:** Provides tax-free treatment for National Health Corps Scholarships. In addition, the conferees extended tax free treatment to Hebert Armed Forces Health Professions Scholarships.

**Student Improvement Incentive Awards:** Allows State education agencies to make awards to public schools that demonstrate a high level of academic achievement.

**State Incentives for Teacher Testing and Merit Pay:** Authorizes the Department of Education to provide awards to states that test their K-12 teachers every three to five years in the subjects they teach and that have a merit pay program.

**Same Gender Schools and Classrooms:** Allows federal funding for education reform projects that provide same-gender schools and classrooms, as long as comparable opportunities are afforded both sexes.

**Reading Excellence:** Authorizes a literacy program that focuses on training teachers to teach reading using scientifically proven methods such as phonics. The President supports the program and \$210 million was appropriated by Congress last year to establish a literacy program.

**Safer Schools:** Includes language providing that weapons brought to school are admissible as evidence in any internal school disciplinary proceedings.

I genuinely hope that the President will sign this bill.

#### THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Tuesday, June 23, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,500,927,020,489.88 (Five trillion, five hundred billion, nine hundred twenty-seven million, twenty thousand, four

hundred eighty-nine dollars and eighty-eight cents).

One year ago, June 23, 1997, the federal debt stood at \$5,332,782,000,000 (Five trillion, three hundred thirty-two billion, seven hundred eighty-two million).

Five years ago, June 23, 1993, the federal debt stood at \$4,302,429,000,000 (Four trillion, three hundred two billion, four hundred twenty-nine million).

Ten years ago, June 23, 1988, the federal debt stood at \$2,527,068,000,000 (Two trillion, five hundred twenty-seven billion, sixty-eight million).

Fifteen years ago, June 23, 1983, the federal debt stood at \$1,303,239,000,000 (One trillion, three hundred three billion, two hundred thirty-nine million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$4 trillion—\$4,197,688,020,489.88 (Four trillion, one hundred ninety-seven billion, six hundred eighty-eight million, twenty thousand, four hundred eighty-nine dollars and eighty-eight cents) during the past 15 years.

#### MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

##### EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting one withdrawal and sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

#### MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 4:03 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Hays, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 3853. An act to promote drug-free workplace programs.

H.R. 4105. An act to establish a national policy against state and local interference with interstate commerce on the Internet, to exercise congressional jurisdiction over interstate commerce by establishing a moratorium on the imposition of exactions that would interfere with the free flow of commerce via the internet, to establish a national policy against Federal and State regulation of Internet access and online services, and for other purposes.

The message also announced the House has passed the following bill, without amendment:

S. 2069. An act to permit the mineral leasing Indian land located within the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in any case in which there is a consent from a majority interest in the parcel of land under consideration for lease.

#### MEASURES REFERRED

The following bill, previously received from the House of Representatives for the concurrence of the Senate,